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Emerging issues related to higher education in India

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Abstract

Macro level factors have direct and indirect bearing on the higher educational institutions of the under developed and the developing countries. With the advent of changes that took place in worldwide economic order has immense consequence for higher education more so under the changes that have taken place in the recent past with regard to globalisation, industrialisation. Information technology advancement and its impact on education aided to the policy changes that have taken place at the organisations who are at the helm of affairs for the administration of higher education in India. India recognizes that the new global scenario poses unprecedented challenges for the higher education system. Globalization has led to increased interdependence of the countries worldwide for marketing of services, flow of capital and of course human migration and exchange of technology. However, this is also a fact that this model of globalization is actually intended to benefit the developed countries more than the rest. The role of higher educational institutions is to produce an intellectual leadership dedicated to the principles of the Constitution i.e. Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. In order to achieve the same, we need to introspect about the extent to which the existing education system is striving towards achieving the same.

Keywords: Higher Education, Globalization, Challenges in Higher Education.

Introduction

Before we take up the matter of scrutiny of the status of Higher Educational Institutions in the country and forecast about the prospects, we probably need to move to retrospect and understand the geopolitical scenario, which actually is of the main factors influencing the status of higher educational institutions in the country. Through this new strategy of globalization the developed countries started playing the role of 'Virtual States' as some scholars like to term it. Globalization calls for a very precise economic and social division between North and South, or between hegemonic central countries and dependent peripheral countries. That division means that the academicians, scientists, artists and intellectuals of the dependent peripheral countries do not participate in the world academy on an equal footing with those of the hegemonic central countries. And this is so in at least three main respects: (1) there is inequality regarding financial, instrumental and technical resources for research; (2) there is inequality of opportunity for divulging and applying research results; (3) for the sake of relevance to the world academy, the members of the dependent peripheral countries agree to restrict their research to problems, issues, themes, methods and techniques defined in the hegemonic central countries. Instead of defining their own problems, themes, issues and methods in accordance with the needs of their countries and societies, and in keeping with theoretical, scientific, technical and artistic traditions that guarantee the permanence of a Particular history of knowledge making it possible to partake of the universal, they seek to partake of universality (or the "global") assuming for themselves the distinctive nature of Others (Carlos Tünnermann Bernheim *et al.*, 2003) [4].

Globalisation is centre stage in the contemporary world. It interests almost everyone. In the world of higher education, markets and globalisation are beginning to influence universities and shape education, not only in terms of what is taught but also in terms of what is researched. (Deepak Nayyar, 2007) [5].

A mundane understanding of this suggests that this will happen because the manufacturing industries are not only instrumental in depleting the mineral and other such resources but also are more capital intensive than service. The experts like Baumol (1967) [3] insist that the services may become expensive when the economics of the countries turn more prosperous.

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The argument which is offered to support this contention explains that the manufacturing industries in developed countries, because of its capital intensive characteristics, are capable of reaping the benefits of increased economics of large scale whereas because the international market for services remains imperfect, especially during initial years for want of R & D requirements which not only include 'time factor' but also the culture of IPR and patent, the prices for service register a gallop.

It is not a matter of threat for future, it has rather started happening that might ones (the Virtual States) by spending more on education (specially the newer areas), research and innovation are almost in a position to monopolize over the creamy layer of services and sell (export) these on exorbitant prices to the weaker ones and import, in lieu of that, cheaper manufactured goods and services of skilled worker. Globalization contrary to its stated purpose, thus is set to serve the true intentions of 'might' and the 'weak' despite having understood the trap, will be forced to swallow the kinds of 'gains' through 'globalization' they are left with.

Thus, the concept of globalization is not confined to the purely economic aspect; it is in fact a multidimensional process taking in aspects relating to the economy, finance, science and technology, communications, education, culture, politics, etc. The Delors Report states that globalization is the most dominant phenomenon in contemporary society and that which most influences people in their daily lives. Education for the Twenty-First Century should teach us to live together in the global village and to desire such harmony. That is the meaning of learning to live together, one of the pillars of education for the Twenty-First Century, so as to turn us into "citizens of the world", but without forfeiting our cultural roots or our identity as nations. Manuel Castells has this to say about it: "There is no other course than to sail the choppy global waters. It is therefore essential, for that inescapable and potentially creative voyage, to possess a compass and an anchor. The compass: education, information, knowledge, both individual and collective. The anchor: our identities; knowing who we are and whence we came so as not to stray whither we go".

The changes spearheaded by economic liberalisation and globalisation are having an impact on higher education (HE) worldwide. With the advent of structural shifts in global economy, productivity enhancement and technological progress are driving demand for highly skilled workers, innovators and knowledge workers. Under these circumstances, it is high time for us to recognize the fact that in order to take on the challenge thrown by the so called developed countries, we need to understand our strengths, one of which is our vast human resource. While, higher education gives India an edge in the world economy as evident from the availability of the skilled manpower, and research scholars working abroad, unemployment, illiteracy and relative poverty continue to be the major deterrents to realize her potential in human resources. The task force constituted by World Bank and UNESCO during 2000 has also observed that higher education helps increase wages and productivity that directly enrich individuals and society. The prospects and development in the higher education sector in India needs a critical examination in a rapidly globalising world.

The weakness of ours unfortunately is such over which we may not be able to overcome, at least in near future, and that is the scarcity of capital. Why not then take the advantage of our human capital, which at times has proved its superiority

over 'them'- our performance on IT sector for example. If we are able to do that we will, at least to the extent of our success, be able to change the complexion of the world market of services from imperfect to partly perfect and gain thereof. Needless to say that in order to do that we will have to gear up ourselves in addressing the deficiencies which have weakened our knowledge centers especially higher education and the institutions imparting it. We will have to ascertain the ideals and the standards (in terms of its parameters) we would like to test with the higher educational institutions in the country. In order to keep up to mark global standards, India needs to make a major investment to make human resources productive by coupling the older general disciplines of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and commerce to their applications in the new economy and have adequate field based experience to enhance knowledge with skills and develop appropriate attitudes. We need to emphasize on the agenda of a well-informed reform for the higher education with a focus on whole range of skills that are needed from the graduates of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and commerce, as well as from the various professional disciplines such as agriculture, law, management, medicine, engineering, social work etc..

Historical Overview of Higher Education Related Initiatives in India

When we look back towards the march of higher education and its institutions especially during the period since independence till date, we find that the science subjects could find a respectable place in the minds of our planners and leaders, as compared to the disciplines of humanities, social science, languages, art & culture etc. It was partly this backdrop in the minds of the planners and leaders owing to which the educational institutions engaged in imparting higher education in science were tipped with the lion's share of the budgetary allocation and only a consolatory amount used to be left for non-science disciplines and the institutions imparting education in these fields. The matter of the 'favored' and 'not so much 'favored' between the two areas of knowledge was not confined to allocation of funds alone. It was rather almost all-round neglect of the 'other'. Since the rethinking has now taken the shape, we find an improvement in quality of attention of our destiny makers towards the non-science disciplines. As because the role of non-science disciplines is essential for even for high quality professional training.

It was the first half of the last century when with the support and cooperation of the philanthropists and altruists of the society a good number of privately owned and run higher educational institutions saw the light of the day. After independence the governments of the land either took over many of these or allowed the control of these by its founders but with the hands tied through regulations.

Various committees and commissions on education have been formed over the years have emphasized directly or indirectly the need for improvement and recognition of quality in Indian higher education system. Since the adoption of the National Policy on Education (1968), there has been a tremendous expansion of educational opportunities at all levels, particularly in higher education. The Constitutional amendment in 1976 brought education to the concurrent list making the central government more responsible for quality improvement (Stella and Gnanam, 2003) ^[12]. The New Education Policy (1986) emphasized on the recognition and reward of excellence in performance of institutions and

checking of sub-standard institutions. After 1991 we are back to square one and are looking for more and more private investments in higher educational institutions. We tried to be convinced that it was only during 1947 to 1991 when a great amount of government control over the institutions of higher learning was imperative and indispensable and now the 'education' can better be looked after by merchants, traders and politicians and, therefore, they should be given a free hand to decide the criteria for admission to students and select the teachers having qualification and experience they find suitable, fix the rules for the security of service and the service conditions of teaching and non-teaching employees, frame the syllabus, decide the amount to be charged as fees, develop the systems of examination and maintenance of discipline.

Current Statistics Relating To Higher Education Institutions in India

Higher Education sector has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of Universities/University level Institutions & Colleges since Independence. The number of Universities has increased 34 times from 20 in 1950 to 677 in 2014. The sector boasts of 45 Central Universities of which 40 are under the purview of Ministry of Human Resource Development, 318 State Universities, 185 State Private universities, 129 Deemed to be Universities, 51 Institutions of National Importance (established under Acts of Parliament) under MHRD (IITs - 16, NITs - 30 and IISERs - 5) and four Institutions (established under various State legislations). The number of colleges has also registered manifold increase of 74 times with just 500 in 1950 growing to 37,204, as on 31st March, 2013 (MHRD, 2015).

Challenges Ahead For Higher Education and Its Institutions in the Country

In addition to the challenges for Higher Education and its institutions in the country identified by the University Grants Commission (UGC) itself, which are appended herewith, the following are some such challenges as stated below:

Ensuring Quality Education

In spite of impressive growth in the enrollment and number of institutions, quality seems to be the worst hit. In the process of rapid expansion in the system, in terms of quantity we may be doing well but poor quality is responsible for large scale unemployment and under employment of our graduates. We have dichotomy of large vacancy in our colleges and equally large exodus of students to other countries like USA, France, UK, Canada, Australia for higher technical education. Our industries have been experiencing the dearth of skilled and competent hands while a large number of graduates are on the street looking for some form of employment.

Quality Assessment Mechanism

The quality assurance agency for higher education in India is the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) established in 1994 by the University Grants Commission. The NAAC has the responsibility for undertaking both institutional and programme accreditation of all higher education institutions in India, public and private, except in the field of agriculture and in distance education, in which cases accreditation is carried out by the Accreditation Board and the Distance Educational Council, respectively. The NAAC assess the institutions based on the certain criteria

viz. Curricular Aspects, Teaching, Learning and Evaluation, Research, Consultancy and Extension, Infrastructure and Learning Resources, Student Support and Progression, Organization and Management, Healthy Practices. To achieve the goal of making quality assurance an ongoing focus and priority integral to the functioning of Indian institutions of higher education, a number of post-accreditation activities have been developed. The NAAC has initiated various mechanisms of promoting quality in higher education, established Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQAC) at all higher education institutions as a post-accreditation quality sustenance measure.

In addition to the NAAC, there are other accreditation bodies tend to be in-house mechanisms of different statutory authorities, e.g. the National Board of Accreditation of the All India Council of Technical Education, and the accreditation boards of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and the Distance Education Council etc. While these agencies conduct assessment and accreditation of programmes or institutes within their respective domains, many specialized institutes that they accredit also volunteer for institutional accreditation by the NAAC. Quite a few engineering, medical, fine arts, law and management institutes, for example, have been accredited by the NAAC. This trend points out the need for a national quality assurance framework which will coordinate and integrate the functions of the various players engaged in assuring the quality of the diverse range of educational opportunities offered by the Indian higher education system (Jagannath Patil, 2006) [9]. Establishing this single point of reference for the status of any Indian higher education institution or programme, serving the needs of the Indian public as well as the international community in terms of informing/authenticating higher education offerings, represents one of the greatest challenges for the future.

Internationalization of Higher Education

We have entered in to a new regime i.e. globalisation has given rise to the increasing competition among educational institutions for students and funds. The overall scenario of higher education in India does not match with the global quality standards. In order to cope with the increased competitions from the institutions there is an urgent need to focus about their quality. Hence, there is enough justification for an increased assessment of the quality of the country's educational institutions. International cooperation is gaining importance as yet another function. With the increased development of transport and communication, the global village is witnessing a growing emphasis on international cooperation and action to find satisfactory solutions to problems that have global dimensions and higher education is one of them. The need of the hour is to critically understand the policy about internationalization of higher education with clear guidance about what mechanism will be allowed to impart education in the country.

Regulation of Private Education

The participation of private parties in higher education in India dates back to the days of the British raj. However, after Independence, the ability of the private sector to provide the infrastructure necessary for development was doubtful and so the government took higher education into its own hands (Kumar, 2013) [10] although a good number of educational institutions, known for philanthropy and quality education were established by private parties. Till the 1980s, the

government not only supported higher education and its expansion but also extended helping hands to run the institutions set up by the private sector (Agarwal 2006, Tilak 2008) [1]. After the 1980s, the country witnessed a profusion of private professional education in the name of meeting the prevalent unmet demand of business and industry. The economic crisis towards the end of the 1980s and subsequent adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP), characterised by liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation in 1991 added to the impetus for the private sector to view higher education as a potential venture.

However, since 1991 the policies of the government have dramatically changed the seemingly privileged position of higher education. The government began to talk of removing public support to higher education and to make it self-financing while privatizing it. Higher education has also become a non-merit good. Private institutions are permitted to be set up on a liberal scale without a clearly defined policy to regulate the private institutions (Anandkrishnan, 2004) [2]. However, there has been in recent years a quite but steady increase in private participation in general and professional education in particular. Over the last few decades, the private institutions have entered the scene and attempted to respond to the massive demand for education at the post - secondary level. This is particularly true in the fields of engineering, medicine, and management, and much less at the broader level of university education.

The growing presence of the private sector, particularly in the realm of professional education has been able to cater to the increasing demand for skilled man power to a large extent in the face of stagnation in the government-aided institutions. But it has been achieved at a very heavy price. Not only has access suffered because of the rise in the cost of education and dilution of the quota principle, broadly speaking, excellence has not been achieved. In order to have parity in the worth of degrees, fees structure, disciplinary matters, service conditions of teaching and non-teaching staff, qualification, training and average age of teachers and geographical dispersion, there needs to be an effective mechanism. There should be operational, financial and academic autonomy coupled with accountability.

Higher Education with Distance Mode

The technological revolution has led to a dramatic transformation in distance education as a mode of delivery. The world of professional education is also being influenced by markets and globalisation. The world of distance education is somewhat different and could provide a silver lining to the cloud. Market forces and technical progress have opened up a new world of opportunities in higher education for those who missed the opportunity when they finished school or those who did not have access earlier (Deepak Nayyar, 2007) [5].

The National Policy on education (NPE) speaks about Open University and Distance Learning to augment opportunities for higher education, as an instrument of democratizing education and to make it a lifelong process. The flexibility and innovativeness of the open learning system are particularly suited to the diverse requirements of the citizens of our country, including those who had joined the vocational stream. In order to provide quality education through Open and Distance Learning System and to ensure a parity between the degrees awarded by the institutions through distance mode and the ones through regular and in-person-interaction, appropriate mechanism needs to be

evolved especially for the courses which needs field orientation and practice. Appropriate institutional to be assigned the task of field work supervision is a major challenge.

Under-Financing of Non-Science Disciplines and State Universities and Colleges

The issue of financing and other related aspects deserve attention in the present context as the mode of financing would determine the emerging contour of the higher education system in India (Saumen Chattopadhyay, 2007) [11]. The decline in public funding in the last few decades has resulted in serious effects on standards due to increasing costs on non-salary items and emoluments of staff, on the one hand, and declining resources, on the other. A large number of colleges are precluded for UGC development grant, as they are unable to meet the minimum eligibility criteria laid down by the UGC- a minimum critical level of quality in terms of physical and academic infrastructure. As a consequence of the same, most of the colleges and universities lack in high-end research facilities. Under-investment in libraries, information technology, laboratories and classrooms makes it very difficult to provide top quality instruction or engage in cutting-edge research. In order to speed up the path to development, there is a need to bridge the gap through more budgetary allocation. While doing so, there is a need to ensure equal importance to the non-science disciplines. Attention must also be given not only to those universities and colleges which are funded by the states but also those which are outside the gamut of the UGC funding and control.

Providing Relevant Education

The issue of offering relevant education also poses serious concern. It was recognized that relevant education would involve three aspects. It involves imparting of scientific knowledge to the students on the subject so that we create knowledge society with scientific approach and mind. Beside knowledge it also involves imparting of skill and working knowledge, and thereby develops human resource necessary for economic development. And finally relevant education also involve providing value education so that education serve as an instrument of creating citizens who cherish value of democracy, secularism, fraternity, and equality. The higher education which we recognized was to develop curriculum at college and university level which will meet these three goals of education.

Knowledge is the base for overall growth and if the nation has to be competitive and to be at par with the globalization pace, the education system needs to be fully equipped with the knowledge base to meet the need of the emerging opportunities, increasing younger generation population and challenges of the 21st century. After having completed a UG. degree in science, arts or commerce, an average student is ordinarily not able to get such an employment with the support of which he/she can survive with his/her average sized family; on the contrary there continues to be a dearth of the graduates having acquired education and skill in many other disciplines- fine arts for example; the interdisciplinary composition, therefore, needs to be rectified. There is a need for major investment to make human resources productive by coupling the conventional general disciplines of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and commerce to their applications in the new economy and having adequate field based experience to enhance knowledge with skills and

develop appropriate attitudes. The programme must be focused on developing strategies and mechanisms for the rapid and efficient transfer of knowledge and for its application to specific national and local conditions and needs.

Universities and higher education institutions in general, are increasingly impelled to enhance their capacity to focus upon 'useful' problem-centered sources of knowledge, create wider partnerships for learning, cross disciplinary boundaries and promote trans-disciplinarity, and to discover, exploit and share knowledge in new ways.

Issues Related To Pedagogy

There is a growing societal demand for universities to take up the role of translating and communicating knowledge to wider audiences. Achieving these learning outcomes require learning environments and teaching strategies that offer students opportunities to experience and exploit tacit knowledge and that encourage them to take ownership of the learning process.

The basic problems of higher education which affect the pedagogy are lack of adequate infrastructure facilities, declining research standards. Researchers have discovered that students understand more through practical, simulations and demonstrations etc., in addition to some other systems of teaching like case studies, site visits, excursion tours and project preparations than class-room teachings; the educational institutions, therefore, not only need to be encouraged to adopt a variety of measures for the purpose but funded too as required by these systems of teaching. Student-centered education and employment of dynamic methods of education will require from teachers new attitudes and new skills. Methods of teaching through lectures will have to subordinate to the methods that will lay stress on self-study, personal consultation between teachers and students, and dynamic sessions of group discussions, debates, seminars and workshops.

The real challenge for our institutions and teachers is to create and sustain an education environment that encourages students to be creative and entrepreneurial in spirit and deeds. The real challenge before them is to become job generator and intellectual property developer. The need of the hour is to give proper attention to the need for an informed and well-thought-out pedagogy for a heterogeneous classroom. There is a need to strengthening the human element of teacher-student relationship and between student interactions.

Challenge of Language

Higher educational institutions draw students and teachers from diverse multilingual and ethnic/regional backgrounds, with differing levels of access to English, which usually is the medium of instruction adopted in institutions of higher learning. The present situation in which knowledge of English is given disproportionate weightage in higher education is undemocratic.

While English may continue as the medium of instruction in the universities and colleges, there has to be some provision for the production of knowledge and its dissemination in the mother tongue in the University. This is because there is a greater possibility for the production of knowledge, especially in humanities and social sciences, in the mother tongue than in other languages.

Key problems associated with challenge of language are non-availability of quality Indian language resources and training for education and pedagogy; lack of programmes that can

effectively translate knowledge resources into teachable curricular content; and lack of teacher-training for employing innovative pedagogic approaches using Indian language materials (Tejaswini Niranjana, 2013) ^[13]. To target the problem of resource material and to ensure its circulation within the university, it would be necessary to generate new materials in regional languages and mainstream them for curricular use. This could be done by creating new model curricula and courseware in selected disciplines and field-testing them in classroom situations. We would have to formulate new teaching methods (build bilingual pedagogies) to train non-metro students, and work towards aggregating existing digital resources and merge them with curricular experiments using Indian languages. The generation of new materials in Indian languages and their mainstreaming would necessarily involve not just textbooks but also interdisciplinary readers, translations from other Indian languages, mediated translations from English, bridge materials for existing curricula, and non-print materials including audio and video. Building digital resources would be a complementary task in the whole process of bridging language induced digital divide.

Issue Related to Enrolment Expansion and Teacher-Student Ratio

As pointed out earlier, the growth and expansion of higher education in the country, in post-Independence period, has been rapid and sizeable. Yet it could have been quite inadequate. Moreover, it has been uneven which has given rise to numerous access-related issues. Let us have a close look at access related issues to higher education in the country.

As per the survey conducted by the HRD Ministry covering entire Higher Education Institutions in the country i.e. 642 Universities, 34908 colleges and 11356 Stand Alone Institutions have been prepared during the survey states that total enrolment in higher education has been estimated to be 28.56 million with 15.87 million boys and 12.69 million girls. Girls constitute 44.4% of the total enrolment. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India is 20.4, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. GER for male population is 21.6 and for females it is 18.9. Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in Universities and Colleges is 25.6.

With regards to Level-wise Gross Enrolment Ratio, the highest numbers of students are seen enrolled at Under Graduate level (79%) across India. On the other hand, second to Under Graduate, 11.8% students are enrolled in Post-Graduation. Socio-Religious Category -wise Distribution shows that SC student enrolment is 12.5% of the total student enrolment whereas students belonging to ST category constitute only 4.2% and 31.7% of the total students belong to OBC. Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in Universities and Colleges is 25.6 at All India Level. Including Stand Alone Institutions it is 24.0 (Government of India, 2013) ^[7]. As per the Eleventh Five Year Plan document, the enrolment of students in the private sector is more than 50% of the total enrolment in higher education. On the other hand, a majority of the government-aided higher education institutions (HEIs) continue to be plagued by poor governance resulting in poor quality of education.

In a large number of educational institutions it is adverse; interestingly in some it is the opposite as well; the policy and the practice in this regard need to be reviewed to ensure an optimum ratio to ensure requisite communication of knowledge to students.

Attracting Cream of the Society to Join the Higher Educational Institutions as Teachers

Even today, i.e., despite the pay hike for university and college teachers and substantial proportion of the creamy layer of the students does not feel attracted toward teaching and research; this needs review of the matter. Industry and students are expecting specialized courses to be offered so that they get the latest and best in education and they are also industry ready and employable. Vocational and diploma courses need to be made more attractive to facilitate specialized programmes being offered to students. Appropriate incentives should be provided to teachers and researchers to make these professions more attractive for the younger generation.

Concluding Remarks

In view of the above, it is pertinent to strive for not only massive rearrangements in both the provision and the utilization of public as well as private resources, but also profound and durable changes in institutional cultures inside and outside higher education. With the advent of increasing diversities in higher education, there is a need to develop closer relationship between the institutions with diversity. There is also need to relook into the relationship between the educational institutions particularly the higher educational institutions and the external world, towards the increasing need of market economy; we need to prepare our human resources suiting to the needs of the emerging economy without compromising the contextual relevance of our society. Higher educational institutions can play extreme important role in occupational preparation of its human resources through appropriate applied education to the masses. The higher educational institutions need to shoulder the responsibility of understanding the urgency of the issues and plan in such a way to improve the overall life of the stakeholders by making them aware about new discoveries, technologies and imparting employable education like vocational courses. In order to make the higher educational institutions more relevant to the contemporary realities like the poverty and unemployment, which requires strengthening the potentials of the existing human resources through training and motivation.

The need of the hour is to introspect the higher education system with a focus on how effective we can make the system more inclusive, catering to the masses irrespective of their socio-economic status. This will address the problems with regards to Rural-Urban disparities, Inter-state Disparities, Inter-religious group Differences, Inter-caste Variations, Gender Disparities, Disparities among Occupation Groups, Poor-Non Poor Disparities. The matters like giving equal emphasis on quality of teaching as well as research, make the research more relevant to understand the societal needs through action research and intervention. The curriculum should be given utmost importance to make it more indigenous so that the students after having acquired the degrees are in a better position to address the problems of our macro and micro society.

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